LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L

BY MACGREGOR JENKINS

.10

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/literaturewithla0000macg_x3z3

Books by MacGregor Jenkins

PUBLISHED BY

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

THE READING PUBLIC.

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L.

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L
AND
FELLOW TRAVELERS

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L

AND

FELLOW TRAVELERS

BY

MacGREGOR JENKINS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

COPYRIGHT, 1919, BY MACGREGOR JENKINS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TO
J. D. J.
AND
S. E. J.

CONTENTS

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L . 1
FELLOW TRAVELERS 53

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L

LITERATURE WITH A LARGE L

THOSE who have much to do with the making and selling of a product known as literature are in a position, or at least ought to be in a position, to know something of the attitude of the public mind toward this particular commodity.

And it so happens that this attitude possesses so many and so varied forms that the study is an endless and a fascinating one. It also happens that some of its manifestations are so extraordinary and so humorous that we wonder more than ever at the ingenuity as well as the credulity of the human mind.

A man who makes shoes assumes (perhaps unconsciously) an attitude

of contempt toward this useful article, born of familiarity and a true knowledge of how poor a shoe the public will accept if properly cajoled. I have in mind a gentleman who is by profession a repairer of automobiles. Long familiarity with the internals of a machine, an intimate knowledge of their frailties, and an appreciation of the sham of paint and varnish have induced in this man, otherwise a kind and affable person, a depth of pessimism in regard to automobiles that the wildest enthusiasm of a new owner cannot dissipate. No car is a good car; some are a bit better than others, but none are good. All is vanity, and vain-glorying, mortal man is born for sorrow, and the automobile is an especially designed instrument provided by Providence to

inflict a righteous punishment upon man and woman in their fallen estate.

In the following pages an effort will be made to avoid this attitude of despair and at the same time to get, in the vernacular of the "movies," a "close-up" of this much-discussed subject. And because it is so much discussed, doubts may well assail us as to the wisdom of saying anything. One of the most depressing attributes of the subject is the fact that literature seems to engender more utterly useless and unprofitable conversation, and more futile writing, than any other subject with which I happen to have a bowing acquaintance.

More is said on this subject that need not be said, and more written that ought not to be written, than on any other. Unfortunately, it is the

fate of some to be compelled to hear much that is said and to read more that is written, with the result that I, for one, long with a great and fervent longing for a region where the alphabet is unknown, where I could stand comfortably on one leg, draped in a becoming garment of sheepskin, and gaze out over a purple ocean to no place in particular, refreshing the inner man at intervals with a ripe cocoanut which would fall when needed from a convenient tree. No alphabet, no books, no schools, no literary journals, no cults and *isms* and other sillinesses. Only an all-pervading peace, and sweet communion with happily unlettered savages.

And as I long for my island, I am reminded that once this worn old

world was such a happy place. At once I find myself charmed with the contemplation of the blissful state of man before literature was invented and came to plague him.

As this discussion is designed purely for mental relaxation, suppose we dally with this bauble for a moment. It will do no harm and may serve to free our minds of other and less agreeable thoughts.

Contemplate with me, then, the cave man: secure beneath ground, enjoying the excitements of the chase, eating to repletion with no thought of the morrow, battling with other tribesmen, and in his softer moments indulging in masterful and vigorous wooing of the maiden of his choice. A professor of literature would not perhaps regard this as an ennobling

or enlightened life, but to some of us of candid mind it has obvious attractions.

And think how long this happy state lasted — if we are to believe the geologist, perhaps thousands of years.

Truly the world knew a happy infancy.

Then the unhappy day dawned upon which some eccentric cave-dweller was fated to scratch on the wall of his cave the rude outline of a tiger. Then the trouble began. I can see the others coming to admire and to discuss the new wonder. Then a rival, from whose hairy arms perhaps the literary gentleman had snatched the lady whom he hoped to win, came and sneered at the drawing — it was cold, it was unimaginative, it lacked atmosphere and

motive, it really did not look like a tiger; and there we are! Two schools of literature born in one day, and the world never again to be free from the turmoil.

I know little or nothing of dates — except the edible ones — but I have been informed that subsequent to this time changes came fast and furious: some one invented things called *letters,* and so, instead of drawing a picture of a tiger, a word could be written that meant a tiger. Oh, day of unhappy omen! The whole human race is now in bondage to the alphabet.

Take up your child's first reader and you can read what happened. And, by the way, a first reader is to me a fascinating book, so much more worth while than most novels,

because one may read in it the story of the human race. I often find myself engrossed in the absorbing narrative of a man who, wonderful though it may be, possesses powers of locomotion. We start with the simple proposition that the man ran; the context does not deny it; then through a page of involutions and evolutions of this simple idea, we come back to the place where we started, the undenied and undisputed statement that the man *did* run; now we believe it.

So with the cave-dweller — after the picture, then the word, then the narration of events.

First, simply *tiger.*

Then, a special tiger — *the tiger.*

Statement of fact — *the tiger runs.*

Interrogation — *Will the tiger run?*

Exhortation — *See the tiger run!*

Then, long after, came another great step, the qualifying word, and some long-haired genius evolved "*the tiger runs fast,*" and then it was all over but the shouting—literature was born and man no more was free.

It was probably all very harmless at first, used as it was only as a method of communication, or for the relatively innocent statement of fact.

Then came the historical sense, and it was used to narrate events of the past. Then, after countless generations, came the philosophical sense, and man began to give expression through the written word to abstract ideas. Things went from bad to worse than worse, and the human race did not have even a fighting chance.

Then came the first really big change—the appeal to the imagina-

tion. Then fiction was born. Tired of narrating facts, some bright boy decided to invent some.

But out of all this horror and gloom, the gods did have a golden gift for man — they knew what he was going to be up against for the rest of time, and so they gave him humor. The stars must have danced in their courses the day the first humorist was born. I wonder who he was and what he looked like. What did he do or say? How was he received? Was he promptly shut up, as we shut up some of the really great humorists of our time under the impression that they are crazy?

But we must not forget that first cave-dwelling critic. His race increased until there was an army of them. So when we speculate on the

attitude of the public mind toward literature in those early days, we have to count him in.

This critic and his crew were surly folk, who had anticipated our great fault of taking ourselves too seriously; and besides, they detected in all these new and bewildering literary developments a horrid fact. This humorist fellow was becoming popular, he must be squelched, he was producing a kind of literature that was giving pleasure, he was having mild fun with some of the budding pomposities of that early day — this would never do. This humorist person, and we would better describe him if we were to call him a humanist, was making people believe that literature was something designed as an agreeable adjunct of daily life and not a dark and mysteri-

ous science known only to a few, for whom it provided a livelihood. This was the humanizing idea that the critic fought in those early days, and the bulk of so-called literary criticism to-day seems to have the same object in view.

When letters began to appeal to the imagination and to give pleasure, some of the burden was lifted, and the real lover of them has been trying to this day to keep that horrid burden lifted; but the cave-dweller critic even to-day thinks it is all wrong.

Just when the halcyon days of letters were, it would be hard to say. Certainly long before our time. Some remote period when it was free from all pose and affectation. It would be hard to describe that time, but it would seem to be when it had

emerged from the cave-dweller period, but was still elemental enough to be simple. It was probably devoted to the doing of three things.

The narration of important events, great battles, victories, migrations, and the like.

The presentation and interpretation of important ideas.

The giving of pleasure.

Here are involved the labors of the historian, the philosopher, and the humanist. These would seem to me to be the happiest days of literature. They were the days when men and women wrote when they had something to say; when the putting of a thing into song or story was in answer to some imperious demand for individual or national self-expression, and not in answer to the ever-present

contemporary desire to get into print or to earn robber royalties. Perhaps the critic fellow was useful then in curbing over-production, but to-day, alas, his chief function seems to be to increase it.

But, after all, our interest in that remote period is more or less academic; what we are interested in, or ought to be interested in, is the status of literature in the year of grace 1919. Still more concerned should we be as to our attitude toward it. We have escaped or outlived most of the evils of the past, but it has remained for recent years to add the last and crowning insult to the many heaped on literature from earliest times. And we suffer from this latest folly more than any other. It was when some idiot conceived the brilliant idea of

spelling literature with a large L. He could, with as much reason and equal justice, have decided that salt pork should for all time be spelled with a large S and a large P.

The results were momentous and far-reaching. At once he brought into being a cult. He took in some ways the most useful and beneficent thing in life away from life, and made it remote and mysterious. He made it an end instead of a means.

Suppose some one decided to-day to spell pastry with a large P. What would happen? We all know. At once there would arise discussions on the relation of pastry to human life. There would be solemn discussion as to the relative merits of tin and paper plates. There would be the Under-Crust School and the Upper-Crust

School. Should cheese be served with all pastry — if not, with what kinds? Then, the psychologist would have a whack at it — what is the mental effect of pastry? should it be eaten for breakfast? and the doctor would tell us that its consumption leads to premature baldness and to juvenile crime. Meanwhile the pies would grow worse and worse, and those of us who like them, even for breakfast, would be defrauded and would slowly starve to death.

Now that is just what happened to literature. Just move about and listen to the things people say, just listen to the empty silliness that is talked — on the street, in the home, at the club, and, alas, in the lecture-rooms of some schools and colleges.

Business once took me to a city

where I had no friends; but the prompt and hospitable reception I received from strangers was a delight. Unfortunately my new friends knew as little about me as I did about them. For some mysterious reason they fancied me to be a Literary Person, and met the situation bravely. I was invited to a delightful luncheon, to which, as a special compliment to me, the Local Literary Person was also invited.

I arrived before he did, and spent in common with my hosts a wretched half hour speculating as to the subjects of conversation likely to be introduced. By tactful questioning I acquired such information as I could as to the Literary Person's achievements in the world of letters. His belated arrival — attributed to some

subtle eccentricity of genius — permitted us to address ourselves to the really substantial delights of the table; but after that the awful moment arrived. There *must* be Literary Conversation after lunch, and the two Literary Persons were supposed to supply it. I soon exhausted the few general observations I thought safe, and disaster impended. Then the Literary Person saw his chance, and halting conversation gave way to torrential monologue addressed to a subdued and wondering audience. At last it was all over — a quiet pipe beneath the apple-blossoms restored my sanity. The same group met in the evening, but a rumor had spread that I was not a Literary Person, and for some reason the local celebrity was absent — I fancy he had discovered

my deplorable condition. But what a changed party! The awful incubus of being Literary was lifted and a cheerful self-confidence developed in us all. I found myself surrounded by a charming group of real people — genuine, frank and friendly to a degree. We parted the best of friends, but the promised copy of the Literary Person's last volume of verse, duly autographed, has never reached me. I fear I was a disappointment.

The cruel necessities of the moment made the Literary Pose necessary for these good people, but they soon made a complete and joyful recovery.

Think of the condition in which hundreds find themselves when this pose becomes habitual!

Slowly people have been divided into two classes: those who feel that

they must play the game, and so pose about it; and another class of more robust souls who know they are being cheated out of one of the best things in life, and are so mad about it that they throw the whole thing, lock, stock and barrel, out of doors. Most all of us are touched a little by the malady. We read what other people read. We fall for the publishers' gush about their own books — you know the publisher knows how silly they are: they call them "blurbs." We buy complete editions. We read free verse, and even pretend to understand it. We pick up a vocabulary and talk about realism, technique, atmosphere, background, fidelity to life, and so on. There is not a person living who has not at least once in his life pretended to have read a book he never

heard of, just to keep the conversation going. I have a hundred times, and I admit it, to my everlasting shame.

All this silliness, duplicity, and affectation we owe to just one thing, and that is the large L.

Instead of being a fine, simple, robust thing designed to narrate and interpret human experience, or to contribute to the wisdom or pleasure of the race, literature has become a toy. A miserable, fondled, petted thing that cannot stand on its own legs.

Of course, having reached this low estate, with half the world making fools of themselves about it and the other half ignoring it, just one thing was sure to happen, and it did. It was promptly taken up by a lot of

people who wanted a new toy. They formed clubs to discuss it, they talked and they talked, and they talked. They even went so far as to ask others to talk to them, and I am credibly informed that in some extreme cases they have been known to pay people for talking to them. It all became a sort of cult. Then, of course, these simple folk were exploited by smooth impostors who won fame of a certain sort, and riches too.

A broad-brimmed hat, a flowing neck-tie, and the trick was done. Under the impression that they were worshipping at the shrine of Literature, people flocked to lectures, bought mountains of books, and achieved a pleasant glow of mild enthusiasm for something, they knew not exactly what.

Some of this silliness does no special harm, because a certain proportion of people must be silly about something; and one thing is as good as another; and even literature with a large L is less harmful than another man's wife or another woman's husband.

But what really did do harm happened when a lot of perfectly good, sincere people became bewitched with the big L, and began to teach it. The college student was confronted with a new and unfamiliar vocabulary — he was forced to consider sonnet-construction till he loathed the sight of fourteen lines of verse, one below the other. While the literary club was putting silliness — with a big S — into literature, many schools and colleges were robbing it of interest and beauty

—the very elements by which it should have appealed.

The net result was rebellion on the part of a lot of sensible people who simply would have none of it. And it was at just about this time that most of us discovered literature—and at no worse period in its career could we have been introduced to it. Some of us were fortunate enough to be introduced to it in early life. Most of Bryant's translations of Homer were read aloud to me before I was ten years old.

By the time we went to school we had found it was pleasant to read, and we knew and loved a few good books. Then, we went to school, and were like the little girl who had learned French from her nurse and liked it, until she found out that there

was a grammar, and then she hated it. We discovered that literature had to be studied, and the study was made so dull that we almost forgot our childish pleasure in good books. We came out of school and we found that most of the world was gabbling about Literature. We thought, now for some real fun! and we recalled all we knew before we went to school. But alas! these people weren't gabbling about books, they were gabbling about Literature.

There was the simple soul who believed anything printed to be worth reading — oh! the magic of the printed page! The itch for it, the craving to see one's name upon it, and the consoling thought that many of the world's greatest writers found it difficult to find a publisher — all these

brought into being that piratical person, posing as a publisher, who encourages authors to publish provided they — the authors — pay the bills. What tragedies of self-denial to bring the little book out! What agonies of uncertainty as to its reception — when no reception at all awaits it! and then the bitterness of disappointment, all the more bitter because it must be bravely stifled and concealed! The so-called publisher makes a fair profit on the manufacture of the book, promptly forgets his promises of fame and fortune to the author, and turns to other fields.

Then there were the people for whom the great school of "vaporers" evidently write — those who demand the literary sauce highly spiced and served to an accompaniment of jazz

music; those little folk who take all their dissipation and excitement vicariously, and evidently consider the tawdry tales they read to be faithful pictures of an alluring world in which, but for force of circumstance, they would cut a dashing figure. The same reader who used to buy "The Secrets of the French Court" for a dollar down and a dollar a month, now reads Mr. Chambers and gets vastly more for his money, for "The Secrets" was a sham, but Mr. Chambers is a generous soul and gives full measure. In our search for people interested in good books we found this type a-plenty and also the solemn person who had acquired a habit of talking about art.

An "Art" must be an awful thing to be afflicted with. Those who have

escaped its baneful influence should lead lives of joy and thanksgiving. One of the most extreme cases of "Art" which has ever come under my personal observation was a lady—quite unknown to me—who sought my advice in regard to a separation from her husband because he did not understand her Art.

If her Art, whatever it happened to be, was as crude as her method of applying powder to her nose, the wretch certainly had some excuse.

Another severe case of "Art" was a young man who had an opportunity to live in China for a year or two and to travel the world over incidentally, who hesitated to leave the snug security of his suburban boarding house lest his "Art" suffer. I believe he was prevailed upon to take

the journey and, happily for him, his Art did not survive the rigors of the experience.

In our search for people sharing our innocent interest in books, we encountered all sorts of strange folk who seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy in making up their minds whether or not a book stands the test of what they somewhat vaguely call "technical analysis," quite unmindful of the vastly more important question as to whether the book gives inspiration and pleasure. Such a person seems to me to be in the same general class with the man who spends his entire life measuring the length of babies' noses.

These and hundreds of other dreadful types all appeared after literature was first spelled with a large L. And

it is the greater pity because all of us who are normal human beings have for the most part an unerring instinct for the good book.

One of my most valued acquaintances is a young lady who has just turned her seventh year, and upon whom I sometimes try literary experiments. She knows a good book when she sees it. She tolerates with polite indifference the thousand inanities which are prepared for and offered to young persons of her years, but they do not interest her.

But read her a chapter from Kenneth Grahame's "Wind in the Willows" and she is all eagerness and attention. A solemn friend of mine protested that the book "lacked scale." How could Toad array himself in the wash-lady's garments?

The only possible answer is, if you have a mind like that, don't read Kenneth Grahame or Stevenson or Hawthorne, or in fact anything except an elementary geometry with its alluring descriptions of an isosceles triangle.

This young person knows a lot about books. She knows that a book to be a good book must interest and amuse—in other words, there are just two things that a book ought to do: it should help interpret human experience or it should give pleasure. You could almost make it *one* thing, for it will not give pleasure unless it does in some way, in some measure, interpret life.

And if the large L is a bore and a nuisance to the right-minded reader, think what havoc it has wrought

among the young writers. It has spoiled more young writers than all the other forces of evil combined. These eager young men and women who could write, and write to the everlasting satisfaction of their souls, do not want to write, they want to produce Literature. They do not understand that a jaded middle-aged world would give a lot to know how life reacts on a fresh young mind, expressed in free, unhackneyed terms of youth, nor do they feel the disappointment they inflict when their outgivings are found to be only another immature attempt to produce Literature that will stand the test of Technical Analysis. Some future generation may learn, and then there will be written some things worth reading, though they may

cause pain to the grammarian and stylist.

But what is worse than all this, the large L is in a fair way to rob life of one of its greatest pleasures and solaces. That it may not do so, the first and most important thing for us to do is to acquire a correct conception of what literature really is. To do this, first of all, let's dispense with the large L.

It is *not* an exact science.

It is *not* — except indirectly — an art.

It is *not* a collection of books.

It is *not* a school of thought, made up of rules, dogmas, technical restrictions, and scientific definitions and regulations.

On the *contrary,* it is

A medium of expression, like

speech, gesture and grimace — to be sure, very highly developed and complicated, but in its essentials, simple and understandable.

Now for most of us it is not in the least important whether this medium is used with technical correctness or not; what concerns us is who is using it and what is he communicating to us. If we have reason to suppose that the person using it has had experiences or entertains ideas which are of interest or value, the reading of what he has to say will probably be worth while.

Surprise has often been expressed that the countless books about the war are as good as they are. The extraordinary thing is that any of them should not be good, for the normal man with a great story to tell will tell

that story well ninety-nine times out of a hundred. I have heard surprise expressed that these books are so good from a technical standpoint, although not written for the most part by trained writers. This would seem to be exactly the explanation. These men are telling their story — they are not producing Literature. It has unfortunately required a great war to bring to these men the realization that they can tell a story. Some of them may perhaps find it possible to tell the great stories of peace with the same directness and skill.

Among the many qualities of a good book to which the professional literary person often refers, there is but one the literary definition of which need be borrowed by the man in the street, and that is "philosophic

background"—truly a cumbersome and polysyllabic phrase, but it seems difficult to invent a better one. It simply means that there is a lot in a given book which one cannot see but which one must feel. It means that a book, be it narrative, verse, essay, or what-not, deals with broadly fundamental things and is applicable to any time or clime. To take an extremely familiar and homely example, this would seem to explain the charm to the adult of "Alice in Wonderland," and it is this quality which the child perceives instinctively, and appreciates. Has any one ever heard an American child question the charm or interest of the book on the ground that Alice was a little English girl and many of her experiences typically British? By the magic of the author,

Alice stands for all time in every clime the personification of the child-mind expressed in terms infinitely more deft and convincing than those of the modern child-psychologist.

If uninfluenced by the baneful effect of the large L, and untrammeled by tradition, I believe each of us would instinctively select the good book — not all the same one, but each to his own liking, as individual taste may demand. For this reason it has always seemed to me a pity that people should make a conscious effort to select their reading. The arbitrary choice of a list of titles seems to me a great mistake. The charm of real reading is its digressiveness — the fact that one book leads to another. Get started with fiction, and you may find yourself in metaphysics, but in every

transition from book to book, you have unconsciously followed some natural intellectual craving. Consequently, avoid libraries of the best books, avoid lists of helpful and stimulating reading, and, above all, avoid lists of books representing literature with a large L. Avoid, as you would the plague, the person who talks to you about intellectual development. It is too late for most of us to think about that now. If we were ever going to develop intellectually, we probably would have done so long before this. Let us accept our intellectual bankruptcy as it stands to-day, and make the best possible settlement with our creditors.

The prescription I am trying to write and compound is just sheer pleasure and pleasure alone, all of

which is very well as long as it is possible to stick to general terms; but when asked to particularize, difficulties present themselves. Instead of giving a list of recommended books which will give the added pleasure to life which we are seeking, it is far easier to make some suggestions as to the books which should be avoided.

As a rule, the book with a mission, the book consciously written to achieve a certain result, will be a book not sadly missed if you omit to read it. As a general thing, the extremely popular book is more likely to be popular through its defects than through its excellences; and as we are seeking pleasure alone, let us avoid the solemn books and, by the same token, let us avoid the glad books.

These little repositories of conscious sweetness and light are to my mind the most mournful volumes ever written.

A word has been said in defense of the aimless reader. Purposeful reading resembles the ordeal of a three-mile constitutional at an appointed hour of the day over an appointed stretch of road. The aimless reader, on the contrary, wanders through the by-paths that invite, and gets, in addition to fresh air and exercise, a thousand other stimulating sensations. You can start almost anywhere in the world of books, and open a thousand vistas, any one of which you may follow to your profit. Simply read along the lines of least resistance, and you will find your pathway varied and beautiful indeed.

There is a hopelessly Philistine expression, much jeered at and much criticised. It is the hopeless utterance of the inartistic when confronted with the artistic. Bewildered and overcome, we take refuge in the statement that we "know little of art, but we know what we like." The superior mind scoffs at this, but fortunate I say is the man who does know what he likes. It will prove a safeguard, if you are a normal person, and you won't go far wrong if you read what you like, in preference to what other people recommend.

Incidentally, have your reading give you more than the passing pleasure of the moment. Let it store up for you unconsciously a wealth of interest upon which you may freely draw if emergency demands. Such a bank

account may prove a very present help in time of trouble.

A man of my acquaintance lay many weeks wounded in a German hospital, and suddenly one day he recalled that of the very few books which he had read in recent years, "Henry Esmond" was one. He spent weeks and months patching the story together and living it over again in its minutest details. He believes to-day that it saved his health and sanity. A friend of mine, afflicted with sleepless nights, finds them robbed of half the terrors because during these quiet, solitary hours he re-creates Pickwick.

But to return to our literary friend and his polysyllabic phrase. We have wandered far afield, but curiously enough we find that, without exception, any book which pays a fair re-

ward for the time and trouble of reading it, has in greater or less degree "philosophic background." The books which lack it seem by comparison strangely unreal and unrelated to life. They seem to me to resemble in some curious fashion many of the catalogues sent me by tradespeople in the hope that I may become interested in their wares. They present an endless variety of things and they deal with the most intimate minutiæ of human existence — from your morning dentifrice to the lock on your front door in which you turn the key at night. Intimate as all these subjects are, these interesting volumes fail to reflect life.

Most noticeable is this lack in the catalogue of the manufacturer and dealer in shoes. In its pages are de-

picted in all the lustre and beauty of coated paper and printer's ink the precise and perfect outline of the perfect shoe. Never was shoe so gracefully moulded, never was shoe presented in more alluring confusion of high-lights and half-tones, never were insteps designed with more exquisite curves, never were buttons arrayed with greater symmetry or more perfect precision; and yet they do not seem to represent shoes in the least. They look less like shoes than anything else in the world, and yet the artist and the engraver have lavished care and labor to make it so. Lay this alluring document on the library table and mount the stairs. Before some chamber door you see a pair of tiny shoes. Gone is the lustre, vanished the perfect contour, dingy and droop-

ing are the buttons, the glossy surfaces reduced to a grimy monotone, heels awry and toes worn rough. By no possible stretch of the imagination can this little pair of shoes claim any manner of kinship to the imperial glory of those in the catalogue — and still they seem to bear a certain intimate relationship to human life which their more glorious prototypes do not.

The hundredth book is the little shoes at the head of the stairs, the other ninety-nine are those in the catalogue, and only one book of that hundred is worth reading — it is not difficult to guess which one it should be.

I trust that nothing I have written will be construed as a sweeping condemnation of the many entirely

worthy efforts which aim to guide the literary tastes of the reading public. There are thousands of individuals and hundreds of clubs with genuine literary interests, quite free from pose, that do much to influence and help others. To such as these, my utterances have no special point beyond the fact that it is their duty to teach the doctrine of the humanist to the countless thousands of people outside of their circle who do not yet realize how fine and stimulating and pleasure-giving a thing literature with a small L may be.

The half of the world which is silly over the large L does not interest us. Let them go. They are having a good time. But the half of the world which does excite our interest and pity is the rebellious, sullen, inarticulate half

who sees in all literature only "highbrow stuff" to be avoided and condemned. What a rich, fine thing they are missing! and how much more worth the living would be their lives if they could be made to realize that all the pose and cant and affectation which they sneer at and condemn, has nothing whatever to do with the real function of letters.

Once upon a time there was a commercial traveler who wandered over the face of our broad country, living, sleeping, and eating amid the ornate discomforts of transcontinental railway trains. He confined his reading largely to his "house organ" and beyond its narrow confines knew nothing of the world of letters except an occasional novel or magazine recommended by the train-boy.

One memorable night he sat forlorn and desolate, alone in the smoking compartment. The last line of the "house organ" had been read and re-read. No ministering train-boy brought him a multi-colored magazine. The train was late and growing later every hour. As he stirred uncomfortably in his seat, his hand fell upon a book left behind by some more fortunate traveler who had reached his longed-for destination. He picked it up languidly and glanced through the pages. There were no illustrations, and, as Alice said to her sister, not enough conversation to make the book look interesting. From sheer boredom he began to read. Presently the train crept on to a siding, heaved a heavy sigh, and stopped. The lonely reader did not notice that his journey

was interrupted, but read page after page with increasing delight. When the gray dawn came over the prairie and the train still stood on the siding, the reader closed the book and looked out of the window on to a new world. He had discovered Stevenson.

When at last his journey was ended, his first duty was to sit down and write a letter describing his experience. This letter happened to reach me by a circuitous route and it became my pleasure to answer it. For some time we explored the new world together, and such trifling service as I could render was amply repaid by the delight to be found in the unspoiled enthusiasm of a man who had discovered the pleasure, the profit and the inspiration that books can give.

When I see the smoke ascending

from offerings on the altar of literature with a large L, when I hear the weird incantations of its priests and priestesses, when I view the elaborate edifice of untruth which they have erected, and despair for the future of my race, the lonely figure of the man who discovered Stevenson comes before me, and I am content.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

FELLOW TRAVELERS

IT is now so long ago that I left college that "the humanities" had hardly been invented in my day, at least we heard very little about them. But since that time I am told they have come to be discussed a good deal and have made a great deal of trouble first and last for our pedagogical brethren. If others discuss them, why should not I?

I am a profound believer in the theory so well expounded by Lewis Carroll, who put into the mouth of Humpty-Dumpty a phrase of undying significance when he made him say that "words should be made to mean what you want them to mean." The only people I know who adhere

strictly to this principle are the psychologists: that is why I love to hear a psychologist talk. Of course, I understand not a word he is saying, but it is a noble and an inspiring spectacle to see a mere human being crack a whip over an entire vocabulary and see the words jump up on their little red chairs like so many trained seals.

So when I say "humanities" please realize that I do not care at all what any one else thinks the word means — I am having it mean what I want it to mean.

I am not a psychologist or an educator or a sociologist. I am only a publisher, and that is a sufficiently humble vocation to keep me away from the forbidden heights and depths.

But sometimes, as I go about my daily task, I suspect that there is a good deal of interest to be observed by any one, if he cultivate an open mind and seeing eyes. So I am drawing entirely from the humdrum daily experiences of a commuting business man for what I say, and if we bump into psychology or education or civics, it's no fault of mine. We can blame it to Society or the Social Order or the Tariff or any other convenient bearer of blame for all burdensome things.

In the first place, did you ever try the experiment of really looking at people? It's quite amusing. They are so different from what they seem.

The secret of forgetting names and faces is really inattention. If you hear an interesting thing about a person,

you rarely fail to look at him carefully. I have never had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Cook of polar fame, but if I ever do, I think I shall know him the next time I see him.

A man or woman with daughters is apt to look with interest at their friends; but unless there be some special reason for personal interest on our part, we are for the most part quite indifferent to the people we meet.

The truth of the matter is that to most of us any one outside of our immediate family or circle of intimates is nothing but a more or less distinguishable blur between us and the light. This accounts, perhaps, for our pathetic lack of knowledge of our fellow beings.

What do we know of the citizens of

our own town? We may not be able to know very much. We may not be able to do much for our fellows. We can at least cultivate a sympathetic attitude, and incidentally get a good deal of amusement.

I have amused myself for many years by watching people *en masse*. It is enormously entertaining. I know people who say "I hate a crowd." I feel for those people the same instinctive distrust that I feel for a man who does not like a dog, or a woman who does not like children. I do not mean that I crave the actual physical discomfort of having my clothes torn or my toes stepped on, but from the vantage of a somewhat detached point of view, a crowd is the most entertaining thing in the world.

I do not mean to sentimentalize

about it — that is easy. Very young or very emotional people do that. I did in my youth.

I recall once sitting with a friend in an office window overlooking one of the thoroughfares of a city. It was the night of a national election and the returns were being flashed upon transparencies above the heads of the throng. The street was packed from curb to curb, and as the bulletins appeared, the great crowd surged with emotion — now cheers for news favorable to some popular candidate, or uneasy silence upon the receipt of unfavorable figures.

I stood at the window and looked down at one of the most wonderful sights in the world — a great crowd swayed by the joy of victory or the bitterness of defeat. My friend

lounged in more philosophic mood, and did not seem to share my emotional interest in the spectacle below. The bulletins flashed decisive figures and the crowd broke into a whirlwind of cheers. I turned to my friend and cried, "Look! look! Is n't it magnificent?" He cast a calculating eye upon the crowd and said, "Yes, it reconciles me to the hat business."

I then, for the first time, realized that my friend was a manufacturer of hats; and incidentally the great picture changed from an exhibition of American political enthusiasm to a more humble exhibition of hats. My friend was right: every man jammed in that great crowd from building to building as far as the eye could see wore a hat.

The two of us in the window repre-

sented two distinct points of view, and who can say which was the right one.

In my casual studies of the crowd, I have been struck by several peculiarities. First and foremost is Optimism. The crowd as a rule is hopelessly optimistic; so are most individuals. The fact that most people are reconciled to their earthly lot is one of the most beneficent provisions of an all-wise Providence. There is a lot of grumbling, but the average man is, on the whole, thankful he is no worse off than he is.

We see it everywhere on the street. I recall one stormy, winter evening when I was making my tortuous way through a crowded city street to take what is known in the commuter's vernacular as "the 5:22." It was biting cold and the storm of sleet and

snow made walking difficult. The crowd, bundle-laden and beset by storm and wind, was, as usual, good-natured. As I crossed an intersecting street there stood at the corner, mute and immovable, a heavily-laden truck buried half to its hubs in city slush. Protruding from its side I saw beneath the fitful glare of the street light a pair of well-worn boots and ragged overalls. From the dark and cavernous depths beneath the silent monster there came sharp metallic sounds — unmistakable evidence to the accustomed motorist that needed repairs were being made under the most difficult circumstances. My heart went out to the belated truckman, and I speculated a little at what grim hour of the night he would probably finish his day's work.

A fellow teamster passed, high aloft on the swinging seat of a humbler horse-drawn vehicle. He evidently recognized the boots and the overalls, for leaning down from his lofty seat he shouted to them, "Hello Bill, how's everything?" And from the dim and damp recesses of the truck, "Fine as silk. How's the boy?" rang out in rich hibernian accents, flinging its challenge in the face of a world of cold and storm and discomfort.

This is the spirit you find if you will look for it in every walk in life, and it is the spirit which, after all, has made this strange composite nation of ours indomitable in the face of difficulty. I admit it may sometimes be a bluff, but it is heroic nevertheless.

Another characteristic of the crowd which is there if you will look

for it, is Helpfulness. Walk the city streets and watch the little tragedies and comedies which are constantly being enacted at your elbow. On the surface it looks like nothing but a mad rush — each man and woman for themselves and his satanic majesty close upon the heels of the hindermost; but amid all the noise and bustle, if you look closely, you will see constant evidences that a certain proportion of these whirling little units in the crowd have thought and care for others than themselves. Watch the blind man on the corner, tapping the curb with a tiny cane, lightly held in irresolute hand. By some curious law of averages, it will be the third passer-by who will help him across. The first two doubtless feel faint stirrings in them to help, but

the third man is he who really stops to do it.

One in *three* is not a bad proportion, and strangely enough we have distinguished precedent for these figures, for was it not the priest and the levite that passed by before the Good Samaritan came? He was the third man. The proportion was the same then as now. Human nature does not change with the centuries.

And hand in hand with this spirit of helpfulness is another quality, somewhat more elusive and difficult to detect, but abundantly in evidence wherever men and women meet together — and that is Faith.

One of the great charms of the sidewalk orator is that he answers with tremendous positiveness and power a thousand-and-one utterly unanswer-

able questions. It is a relief to find an occasional man to whom life is an open book and for whom the future holds no doubt and the past no regrets. While the average man is fortunate in being able to dismiss for the most part the regrets of the past, he has yet to arrive at a point where he can dismiss the questions which assail him in regard to the future. The crowd is full of eagerness to question, and finds much in life to ask questions about.

Did you ever see a crowd listening to the buglers playing the old tunes on Christmas or New Year's Eve? Did you ever look down into the faces of a crowd listening to a great public speaker? Did you ever mix with the brethren and sisters of a Sunday on the Boston Common, as

they listen to the presentation of every known form of religious and scientific untruth? You could not do it without feeling that a great many people outside of colleges and women's clubs are trying to find out a little about a very large number of things.

I have always cherished an affection for the dear old gentleman who stood next to me listening to a lucid explanation of the phenomena which would culminate on October 20, 1949, with the earth falling into the sun and going off like a damp firecracker, and Mars and Venus and all the rest doing a glorious celestial tango while the universe reeled back into chaos.

As the perspiring orator stopped to mop his forehead, the old gentleman turned to me with the sweetest smile

in the world and said, "How interesting; I never thought of that before;" and then with a little sigh added, "But I'm afraid I shan't live to see it all."

If it is not too presuming for a layman to make such a suggestion, is not the function of the church in its last analysis to answer questions?

Sometimes this passion for questions is side-tracked and then we see all sorts of hysteria and trouble. The magazine and daily press feed and fatten on it. A while ago we saw it very plainly in the unpleasant and exceedingly unprofitable clamor about sex-education.

I once had occasion to lecture before an audience of delightful ladies in a suburban community. Before my introduction, the programme for the

coming month was announced, covering the subjects on which papers were to be read and discussions carried on. The programme covered a range of subjects which in my innocence I had previously thought properly confined to the criminologist and similar experts. But no, these were the subjects upon which this entire circle of women were to devote a month of their precious time. After this awe-inspiring announcement, I was introduced as the speaker of the afternoon; and never before had my utterances seemed to me so trivial and so out of keeping with the spirit of the times.

At the conclusion of my talk one brave soul ventured to thank me for an hour quite free from the discussion of the unpleasant and the abnormal. She seemed half apologetic for the

programme which I had heard announced, and assured me that after all the ladies of the club did like pleasant things.

Like the lady in question, the crowd is normal, if it is let alone and allowed to express itself naturally.

Since the episode described above, a great and happy change has taken place. As if by a miracle, all this discussion of the sordid and seamy side of life seems to have been swept from programmes of such organizations, and the minds of normal folk are busy with subjects much more edifying and much more helpful. Perhaps it has taken a great war to silence the clamorous minority in the crowd which was foisting the discussion of these problems upon an unwilling majority.

Places of public assembly offer an

excellent opportunity for the study of your fellow man, particularly if he be there bent upon recreation or amusement. Watch the people about you at the theatre. Near you are a boy and girl — not an uncommon or unusual combination. Both obviously dressed in their best, each more proud of the other than of himself or herself. Observe the conscious gallantry of the escort, and the very evident pleasure of the escorted. If they are more intent upon themselves and their affairs than on the mimic drama of the stage, and if they refresh themselves with confectionery and whisper and giggle at inopportune moments, do not let it bother you. It is not done to offend. They are simply working out the great laws of human destiny.

Beyond them we see the middle-aged and sympathize with their efforts to be young and gay and not to be bored — that each may feel the old pride in the other.

Again, the aged, serene in the assurance that all is well, exchanging timid reminiscent glances at the expression of some sentiment on the stage — hackneyed perhaps, but enshrined in enduring significance in their hearts.

So the world wags. It is all there to see if you will see it — all so gloriously human with all the glorious human virtues and weaknesses. They are like the amiable "scrub lady" who for years gave my office a cursory cleaning. Like some unseen, unknown creature, she ministered to me, unrecognized and unfelt, like a shower

at night, until one fatal morning she was found prone upon the floor clutching her worn mop in one hand, and a bottle in the other. Upon investigation, a few somewhat extenuating circumstances were unearthed: a wayward son, a husband on probation, failing health, a sick neighbor to be watched with during the few hours she should have devoted to sleep, an ill-advised attempt to whip up a worn-out heart with a little Dutch courage. When it was all over, she apologized for her tearfulness when giving thanks, by explaining that she "was not accustomed to being treated *human*."

Back of the humblest and often the most sordid little dramas there is a human explanation.

This all sounds very pious and

preachy. I do not mean it to be. It is only a plea to recognize the human equation in all our relationships.

It seems to me that the lack of this attitude is the real defect in many of our most enlightened and unselfish undertakings. I fancy it hinders more in charitable work and education than in anything else.

I dined once with 250 schoolmasters — 250, count them. To a layman, unaccustomed to scholastic surroundings, it was a terrifying experience. My youthful impression of schoolmasters was not altogether a happy one, perhaps because of the mutual distrust which seemed always to exist between myself and my preceptors. Although I have met many charming and delightful schoolmasters since those early days, I have never

been able to free my mind from my early associations.

As I sat that memorable evening with the other guests, ill at ease and full of forebodings for the future, at what is called at such functions "the speaker's table," I looked down long rows of chairs in which the schoolmasters sat at dinner. An irresistible desire to look under each and every chair seized me. I felt sure that under every one I would see a pair of hoofs and a tail neatly curled upon the floor.

Despite the fact that none of them seemed to have these satanic adornments, the impression they gave on the whole was forbidding and solemn in the extreme.

When the speaking began, I realized the reason for their subdued de-

meanor. This function was like countless others which they had attended, and at every one of them these poor men had been exhorted and uplifted and inspired until life itself had become a burden. Though you may labor in the most inviting of vineyards, though your labor may be productive of the highest possible good, it is not in human nature to stand being told constantly how lofty a mission you fulfill, and how solemnly you should approach your daily task.

It still remains a mystery by what odd trick of fate I should have been present at such a gathering. Probably some member of the committee in charge, with a whimsical feeling for the inappropriate, had brought it about. At all events, the evil hour arrived, and with the utmost decorum

and the most sublime dignity, I was introduced by the chairman quite as if I were the chemical formula for hydrochloric acid, or a new guide to child-study.

Never was after-dinner speaker in a more difficult position. I knew nothing of my hearers or their interests, I did not even speak their language, and yet here I was being offered to them as if from my lips would fall veritable pearls of wisdom. Led by a blind instinct that after all this formidable gathering was composed of human beings, I plunged in. I did my little best. I even went so far as to make a feeble little joke. They stirred uneasily in their chairs and looked at the superintendent of schools out of the corners of their eyes, to see what he thought of such irrever-

ence. Before long I realized that they had ceased looking at the toes of their boots or upon the disordered tablecloths, and were looking at me. Encouraged by this mute approval, I more than ever overstepped the bounds of decorous behavior on such an occasion. Suddenly, from a distant table, shadowed by an overhanging balcony, there rang out a rich peal of truly hibernian laughter. This was too much even for their pedagogical decorum, and the laughter swept over the entire company. Never was a feeble inanity received with such uproarious applause. From then on, it was a lovely party.

At some point during my subsequent remarks the superintendent of schools quietly folded his tent and stole away. At the conclusion of my

remarks, they crowded about me. The awful incubus of uplift no more depressed them. Each had his pet story to tell, every one of which was better than any I had told.

Later in the evening I found myself surrounded by some of the younger, more resolute, and perhaps more rebellious of the company. They explained to my marveling mind the intricacies of the modern public school system — the mass of information in regard to the children in their charge: card indices of indescribable complexity explaining domestic relationships in every family represented and its collateral branches; the character of labor performed by members of the family — whether the mother worked "in" or "out," and many other intimate details, includ-

ing the particular degree of inebriety to which the masculine head of the house was addicted. Nationalities were designated by different colors, and numberless intricate systems of cross-reference supplied the details.

You remember the caucus race in "Alice in Wonderland." One of these men who had spent years in preparing himself for a pedagogical career, who had degrees from countless American and foreign universities, had reached a dizzy height in the school system of our country, where he no longer taught anybody anything. He seemed to be some sort of petty officer who had numberless details in hand, and one of his principal duties seemed to be the scientific drying of wet children. His method struck me as original and quite to be

recommended to parents of large families. Children in every station of life will get wet — it seems to be a law of nature; particularly do they get wet as to their shoes and stockings, if stockings be worn. And especially is this true of the children whose playground is the street and the gutter.

First having ascertained the number of heating units at his disposal, he would then divide the children into groups of *wet*, *wetter*, and *wettest*. The wettest group would be placed nearest to the heating unit and the wet group on the perimeter of the circle. After a stated period the circles were reversed, and so the warmth was equally distributed. After this process had been carried on indefinitely, the children were placed in martial array,

and marched to complete the drying process.

This much the mind of a layman might have achieved; but it required the trained mind of the specialist to conceive the finishing touch which gave artistry to his performance.

The children not only marched, but they marched with what was described as "digital activity." Inside their capacious and ragged shoes, their little toes twinkled merrily as they marched up and down the aisles, thus, as it was explained, creating "ventilation and a quick drying process."

During the recital of this narrative, and in all the discussions of the evening, I noticed that the boy or girl who was consigned to the tender mercies of this complicated system, ceased to

be a boy or a girl as soon as they came under its benign influence. Once the portals of the schoolhouse swung open to them, they lost sex, personality, heart and soul and body, and became "a unit of student attendance."

I went to New York on the midnight train that night and as I rattled along I found myself saying,

"Red card for a German,
Green card for a Jew,
White card for the Irish,
For the Greek a blue."

And when the porter shook me at 125th Street, I was saying, "Gosh, I'd like to be Superintendent of Schools for one hour." But it wouldn't be safe!

I do not mean this as an indictment of our very excellent school system, but rather to illustrate the tendency

shown by every organization in this country to over-emphasize the machine part of its operations, and to minimize almost to the vanishing point the human element. When I recall my own college experience, my recollection of laboratory and classroom equipment is very meagre. The dominant figure in my recollection is that of a delightful and scholarly gentleman who read Greek poetry aloud to us and instilled into the mind of many an idle boy a love of the classics. He did this as an individual and not as part of a system toward a "unit of student attendance."

There is a great hue and cry against the personal pronoun, first person singular. But I rather like to reflect upon it. What a straight upstanding little letter it is. I like to

think of it as a peg firmly driven into the ground: here in a city lot, there on the broad acres of a western homestead; and, running out from it to the invisible circumference of an invisible circle, are countless little threads of acquaintance, devotion, or influence; but there in the middle stands the little letter "I." That is you, that is your neighbor — every one of us is an "I." We think, we live, in terms of the first person singular, and how else can we live? But the mistake we make is when we ignore the "I," the *ego,* in the other fellow.

Was it Barrie, or who was it, who wrote the matchless little story of the discovery by a selfish man of the *ego* in the club waiter? How his senses reeled when he found out that this automaton had a wife and babies,

and suffered, loved, hoped, and despaired just like a real person.

I have spoken of *Optimism, Helpfulness,* and *Faith* as characteristic of the crowd. There is another element which makes the average man interesting — a little more obscure and a little more difficult to get at, because it lies deeper in him — but it is there none the less, if you will find it, and that is *Enthusiasm.*

It does not make the least difference in the world what a man or woman may be enthusiastic about. Of course, some fields of human endeavor are more productive of reward and more intellectually stimulating than others, but the important element is the enthusiasm itself, not its object. If any one ever makes habitual use of the smoking-car on

suburban trains and has failed to notice this characteristic, he has not cultivated successfully the *open mind* and *seeing eye*.

The congested condition of traffic on the line I use makes it necessary for me to have as seat-companion a highly interesting and varied assortment of acquaintances. With these acquaintances I daily hold conversation, and though the allotted time for the beginning and ripening of our acquaintanceship is a scant half-hour, rarely have I failed, before the end of the trip, to discover somewhere in the tired body or jaded mind of my companion a spark of enthusiasm for something. It may be poultry or hydrangeas; it may be an automobile or Ruskin, but it is there, and the flame burns brightly, once you find it.

Sympathy with a man's enthusiasms is the best possible starting-point for an acquaintance. I recall once visiting many years ago a large Western city. I arrived at my hotel at about the dinner-hour, and was piloted by the head waiter through a wilderness of small tables and deposited in a remote corner at a small table set for two. The place opposite me was already occupied by one of the most ferocious-looking human beings I had ever encountered. Even seated as he was, his massive bulk towered above the frail table. As I took my seat, he glared at me with ferocious eyes and vouchsafed no greeting.

I ate my dinner in a subdued and apprehensive mood, but filled with wonder and amazement at the amount and variety of the viands my

vis-à-vis consumed. At the conclusion of a complicated and varied repast, he pushed back his chair and sat gazing at me with evident interest. Presently, with some premonitory rumblings, he addressed to me the question which is the countersign of a great fraternity. "What's your line?" he asked with admirable directness. The stamp of the commercial traveler was upon me and by some subtle insight born of long experience he had detected it.

I explained that I was "traveling with books," and that my humble function was to disseminate the pale light of pure literature over the length and breadth of our fair land. He seemed but little impressed by this announcement, and no further inquiries followed.

The amenities of the occasion evidently demanded something of me. I saw my duty and I did it. "What is your line?" I asked. Before my question he had sat inert and weary, bored and perhaps suffering from slightly undue repletion, and eager for the black cigar in the hotel lobby. But when the magic words were spoken, postprandial delights were forgotten, and he leaned across the table, shaking an impressive finger at me, and announced with a surprising burst of emphasis, "Young man, I travel with the most complete line of babies' sundries west of the Mississippi River."

My astonishment at this announcement prevented further inquiries; but they were not necessary, for with a torrent of expletive he extolled the

virtues of his line. I had scarcely finished my coffee, but he rose and seized me by the arm, and I was conducted to a vast subterranean chamber where he "spread." Beneath the cold glitter of countless electric lights, on long tables on all four sides of the room, was displayed a variety of infant's garments, the like of which I had never beheld. He called my attention to some of the specialties — the "caps and mittens with one, two or three balls," outer garments, bibs, stockings, dresses, and pins with "Our Baby" and "Darling" in black, blue, and green enamel.

The colossus rolled heavily from table to table, and as a climax to his exhibition, he stood erect amid the splendors about him while he caressingly placed on a large and hairy fist

a baby's lace bonnet, deftly tying a perfect bow with his left hand. He held it aloft, and transfixing me with his piercing eye, fairly shouted, "Some class to that!"

Using his enthusiasm as a starting-point, we became close friends during my brief sojourn in the city. Every night at dinner he extolled his wares, expressed his vigorous opinion of the various buyers, and filled the evening with anecdotes from his varied experiences. During my brief acquaintanceship with him, I do not think he betrayed the slightest interest in anything in the world except his "line" until the last evening that we sat and smoked together, when he told me of his crippled son, for whose restoration to health and vigor he was making every conceivable sacrifice.

In this instance the curious and humorous contrast between the physique of the man and the object of his enthusiasm gave piquancy to the incident; but its real significance was that through this strange enthusiasm I found myself admitted to the secrets of his life. The average man can invariably be approached through the channels of his enthusiasms.

How easily that phrase — the average man — slips from the pen. We write of him and we talk of him, but who of us has even seen or met him? For my own part, I have never in my life, so far as I know, met an average person. The average person is like "jam yesterday, and jam to-morrow, but never jam to-day." I have never met a person who admitted himself to be an average person. We all know

a great many average people, and in some instances a very considerable number exist in our own circle of relatives, but so far as we are ourselves concerned, we are not average persons.

So it is with "the general public." The general public has more charges laid at its doors, more characteristics attributed to it, more conjectures made in regard to it, than any other class of people in the world; and yet, so far as I have been able to discover, I have yet to meet a member of the general public.

How often we hear the expression, "I suppose the average man or woman does so and so," the inevitable implication being that the speaker does not share these peculiarities.

And yet, if the truth were known,

there is not one of us who is not a hopelessly average person; there is not one of us who does not belong to the general public; and there is not one of us to whom the great law of social averages does not apply.

There are countless business enterprises, the success of which depends entirely upon the power of those directing them to estimate the taste and buying capacity of the average person. The astute publisher, or mail-order merchant, knows to a mathematical nicety how high a percentage of replies he will receive from a given number of circulars mailed. That these figures may be of value or significance, it is, of course, necessary to address a very large group of people—a group so large that it fairly represents the average of the entire

country. Of course, you and I are too sophisticated to be influenced by the expedients he employs. We know, of course, that the average persons in the general public reply in large numbers.

I have been fortunate enough to gain the confidence of a gentleman to whom the sale of merchandise by mail has become a fine art. So skillful has he become, that the business man and the psychologist have almost merged. Selecting half a million of his fellow beings,—including you, dear reader, and others like you,—he addresses his appeal to you. He knows precisely how many replies he will receive. If his communication contains a return envelope or coupon, a greater number of you will reply; if he informs you that your name has been

sent to him by a mutual friend, you hasten to justify the unknown friend's confidence in you; if you are tactfully informed that you are No. 6491 of a selected group of fortunate individuals to receive this offer, you are feverish in your haste to return your check and order.

My friend has also established some interesting theories in regard to the sexes: men reply at once if they are going to reply at all, women much more slowly; men reply in larger numbers than women to an alluring offer requiring no money down and the payment for the goods only upon their receipt; but the women, having assumed the obligation, pay their bills more promptly. These and countless other generalizations he has worked out through long years of experience,

and the general laws hold good despite the social or financial circumstances of the persons addressed. He has demonstrated to my satisfaction that there are average people, that there is a general public, and I rejoice that I am one of them, for it gives me membership in the crowd, and the crowd is what makes life interesting.

But it can be well said, what has all this to do with the humanities? Perhaps it has n't anything. It all reminds me a little of a comment made by a scholarly and long-suffering gentleman who tried many years ago to teach me the elements of biology. At an examination I was required to write the description of some animal, the long Latin name for which was handed to me on a card.

The meaning of the name I had entirely forgotten, but, nothing daunted, I wrote a description of as horrific a beast as ever graced a dissecting-table or a microscope. Enchanted with the subject, I let my imagination run riot. When the paper was returned to me, it bore in my instructor's exquisite handwriting: —

"A very interesting animal, but not the one required. The description requested was that of the common house-fly."

He was right: it was not a common house-fly, this creature of my imagination, — far from it, — but it was a perfectly good animal.

And so this may not be the humanities — that is, what others more learned than I mean by the humanities — but it may be what I

mean. Let me try to show you what I mean.

Here we are, all average persons, traveling the same road. Shall we push and shove and put others in the gutter? Shall we want the road to ourselves? The wisest of us shy at the questions, why we are here, what we are doing and where we are going. So why not recognize our fellow travelers?

How a home face cheers us in a foreign land. How quickly we make friends in a little journey. How gladly we ask a stranger for gasoline by the roadside. Why not apply some of these principles to the great journey we are all making? A little more cheer, a little more comradeship, a little more helpfulness — it would help a lot.

Young men and women come to me and ask me how to learn to write (as if I knew), and go away sadly when all I can say is, read a few good books, watch what is going on about you, learn to know, really know, as many people as possible. In other words, lead a life as rich in the essentials of humanity as you can; and after all the essentials are the important things. One of the most cheering aspects of this complex experience which we call human life, is that in its essentials it is simple in the extreme.

We hear a great deal said about the complexities of life; we are told that it is so much more intricate and difficult than it used to be. This is, I fancy, because we have roving about over the face of the earth a variety of

folks who would make it so—the psychologist, the socialist, the economist, and countless faddists, and political and social reformers. They are the folks who make life appear complex, for they have superimposed on life all sorts of unimportant details. Life is really comparatively simple. It was Mr. Lowell, I believe, who claimed that there are but three jokes known to mankind, and Mr. Howells failed to find more than seven play plots in dramatic literature.

In the vernacular of daily speech, in the common everyday experience of the average person, how much we hear of the cardinal virtues, of fundamental passions, of primary colors. The human race has clung and is clinging desperately to the

simplicity of life. It must, for its salvation. This explains in a measure, I think, our passion for the old thing —the established order. The thing that has endured, we believe must have real qualities of permanence and truth.

Science is beginning to recognize the importance of the simple and the elemental thing. It is beginning to treat physical ills with fresh air and sunshine, and less and less with drugs. It would be an interesting experiment to go back to elemental things for the cure of more subtle maladies. I wonder what would happen if we tried to solve our intellectual and spiritual difficulties with the old-fashioned virtues of faith and humility; our social difficulties by a recognition of common humanity.

This may not be possible for us of the present generation. We may be lost beyond regeneration, but we can help future generations. We can try to start our children right. Fortunately, we do not believe in heredity quite as much as we used to, and we are coming to believe more and more that each little mind and heart starts fresh and sweet. Let the great book of nature teach them; let them learn of bird and bush, sunshine, cloud and storm; read them the age-old stories of the world, and give them faith in the simple and elemental things in life.

I have read more manuscripts and heard more speeches on education than on any other subject known to civilized man. I once made a noble resolve that never would I raise my

feeble voice to add to the clamor, and now I find myself perilously near doing so.

The reactions of all this talking and writing on an entirely uneducated person like myself may be of some interest, so I will venture to put into words how it all strikes me.

Most speakers and writers appear to me to be talking about a kind of education that to my mind is the very poorest kind, if indeed it be education at all. I have even gone so far as to have a vague theory in regard to what I call education.

Here is a child. He is destined to face human life. We know, or we ought to know by this time, that life is an experience, after all, simple in its elements. We know in the rough what that child will face. The prob-

lem is to help him do two things. To so meet life as to get the very most out of it — the greatest pleasure, the greatest usefulness — and to so express himself in terms of life that he will not only enrich his heart and soul and mind, but do so for others as well.

Now, to do this, I grant, is difficult, but like many other complex problems perhaps the solution is nearer at hand than we think. Perhaps we may find the answer in the heart and mind of the average man. The general public may exhibit characteristics which will help us. The crowd and its attributes may help to solve the problem. These we have found to be Optimism, Helpfulness, Faith, and Enthusiasm — four qualities which would seem to me to make for a con-

siderably higher education than the kind with which we are most familiar. And if by some happy chance, to these four qualities we could add a certain nobility of outlook upon the phenomena of human experience, we have enriched our child beyond the dreams of avarice.

To fit ourselves to do this may be a difficult task, and it may be necessary for us of maturer years to place ourselves again in school; but if we do, let daily experience be the curriculum and the world about us our laboratory. Let us join, in humble and in contrite spirit, the first-class in looking at people; let us try to learn in some way the needs and the perplexities of our fellow travelers. Let us take primary courses ourselves in the four attributes of the crowd;

let us cultivate and exercise them if we can; and above all, let us persist in the belief that the most interesting and most instructive, and incidentally the most amusing part of this earthly experience is our fellow man.

I once sat on a log on the tip end of Cape Cod, with a weather-beaten, seafaring man. We had talked of many things, and finally I said to him, "Captain, you have sailed the world over, you have seen more wonders than I have ever dreamed of, you have been to the Mysterious Isles, and now I ask you, what in all your wide experience is the most interesting thing you ever saw?"

The captain stopped his whittling and became reflective; he cocked his one remaining eye upon the expanse

of heaven above us and spat reflectively upon the sand. "Well, I dunno," he said; "I have sailed about a bit, but first and last, going and coming, fair and foul, I think the most interesting thing I ever see was folks."

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A